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ABSTRACT

Solutions to the problems associated with the establishment of a world government offer opportunities for empirical research and informed reflection. A world government of some kind will very likely supersede the existing international order within the next few decades. Only two possible forms of world government currently appear to be possible: (1) a world empire, established by conquest, or (2) a world federation, established by the agreement of sovereign states. Of these two, the world empire is perhaps more probable. The fascinating problem of world government has been largely ignored by social scientists. This neglect may be attributed to several factors. For example, daily policies of most of the world's existing states are not by any means directed toward the eventual surrender of their sovereign powers. As soon as we begin to take seriously the possibility that a world government might be established, many typical research questions arise. Possible topics include the extent to which diverse politics can be accommodated within a sovereign federation, methods for resolving succession in the component states of a sovereign federation, and methods for changing the constitutions of component states in a sovereign federation and determining the necessary minimum powers of a sovereign federation. (RM)

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THE FEASIBILITY OF WORLD GOVERNMENT:

A RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Prepared for the thematic session on
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It is likely that a world government of some kind will supersede the existing international order within the next few decades. No major power today is technically capable of the primary function of a sovereign state -- self-defense by organized force. The development of nuclear weapons has removed the possibility of the successful self-defense of a nation-state in the face of a serious and determined attack by another.

For the time being, and for the foreseeable future, the age-old seesaw between aggressive and defensive armament has come to an abrupt stop; the cost of any nuclear weapon being infinitesimal compared to the damage it can inflict.

Although it may be possible to devise effective countermeasures against a particular delivery system, it is unlikely that such measures would be perfectly effective or that the use of attentive delivery systems could be prevented.

It is even less likely that nuclear technology, once acquired, will be forgotten or might eventually be suppressed. Although artistic skills have been lost in the course of cultural history, abstract knowledge -- and especially mathematical knowledge -- is virtually indestructible. It is a reasonable assumption that future human societies will know how to release the strong forces that bind atomic particles, and will have to keep the destructive potential of that knowledge in check.

The devices that are now used for that purpose are 1) a world-wide balance of power between two blocs of nations, each headed by a superpower which possesses an enormous arsenal of nuclear weapons and a correspondingly large inventory of vehicles for transporting them to cities and military

installations of the other bloc; 2) the doctrine of mutual assured destructions, whereby each of the superpowers tries to maintain the assured capacity to destroy the population and physical structures of the other, after absorbing the heaviest nuclear attack that the other can mount. The theory is that neither party will consent to its own destruction for the pleasure or profit of destroying the other.

Although these devices have maintained a precarious peace between the superpowers for more than thirty years, there are a number of reasons to suppose that they cannot do so indefinitely.

1) The maintenance of international peace by a balance of power has been frequently attempted in historic times, but never with more than temporary success. Balances of power routinely break down when one side becomes appreciably stronger than the other, either because the stronger side attempts to exploit its advantage, or because the weaker side attempts to recover parity by violence. A balance of power may also collapse because a conflict involving client states places one or both bloc leaders in the position of having to fight or yield.

2) It is not certain that the second-strike capability on which the theory of deterrence depends can be reliably maintained by both sides, given the rapid evolution of nuclear weapons technology. The continous need to protect second-strike capability generates an arms race that is economically and politically costly for both sides, without reducing the risk that one side or the other will be tempted to launch a first strike when it seems to have a temporary technological advantage.

3) The presence of nuclear weaponary in the world has not inhibited the

outbreak of wars fought by conventional means. The era of nuclear stalemate has been an era of continual warfare, both international and civil. Some of these wars arise directly out of the balance of power (Korea, Viet Nam, Angola, Afghanistan, El Salvador) but even those that begin as local conflicts, like the Iraq-Iran war, provoke the superpowers to provide funds, weapons, and moral support. Thus, every war, civil or international, turns into a confrontation of the superpowers. The risk of escalation is so evident that both superpowers have made extraordinary efforts to avoid full confrontation by observing an unspoken rule that where one superpower is directly involved in a local conflict (Viet Nam, Afghanistan, Lebanon) the other will participate only by proxy. But the risk of full confrontation is always present.

4) The system of bilateral deterrence is further threatened by the appearance on the scene of additional national states armed with nuclear weapons and/or targeted for nuclear attack. There are now eight nuclear "third parties" and a like number that had the technological and material resources to go nuclear on short notice. The possibilities of disaster are obvious. In one scenario, a client state of one bloc uses a nuclear weapon against a client state of the other bloc, the offended superpower retaliates in kind and the conflict escalates from there. In another scenario, minor power X destroys a city or two in the U.S or the U.S.S.R. during some convenient crisis with the hope of enticing the superpowers to destroy each other.

The problem of third-party targets is even more pressing. As of 1984 the West European nations are targeted for some 500 Soviet missiles carry-

ing multiple warheads, while the U.S. has begun to deploy a like number of Pershing missiles on NATO territory aimed at Eastern Europe. It is not at all clear what might happen if some of these were fired — the American commitment to respond with a full-scale attack on the Soviet Union from U.S. bases is not taken at face value in Europe; the Soviet response to a hypothetical attack on Poland is even more uncertain. These newer missiles are wild cards that reduce the elegance of bilateral deterrence as a philosophical system and its reliability as a peace-keeping system.

In sum, the twin risks embodied in today's international order are very grave. The one risk is the outbreak of a full-scale nuclear war; the other risk is successful nuclear blackmail. Neither of these outcomes is improbable. Either of them would write finis to the international order as we know it, and present for immediate solution the problem of how to organize a world government.

There appear to be only three imaginable solutions to that problem — a world nation, a world empire or a world federation. The necessary condition for the establishment of a world nation would be the disappearance of all existing sovereign states in favor of a single monolithic state with a single citizenship and a single form of government. Although this arrangement is conceivable in the distant future, it would require the disappearance of existing nations, and of the political, religious, and ideological sentiments they represent. All of the large nations known to history combined smaller nations by conquest or peaceful federation long before they were assimilated into a single national entity. In France, where the assimilation of Burgundians, Savoyards, Navarese, Bretons, Basques and a score of

other nationalities has been going on for more than a thousand years, it is still incomplete. In Great Britain, after many centuries of union, the Irish are stubbornly inassimilable, while the Scots and Welsh have been trying to undo their previous assimilation. There is no reason to suppose that the much more numerous and disparate nations of the whole world will consent to disappear within a century or two.

Only two of the three possible forms of world government appear to be presently possible — a world empire, established by conquest or a world federation, established by the agreement of sovereign states. Of these two, the world empire is perhaps more probable. The empires of Alexander, of Hadrian and of Kubla Khan extended almost to the limits of the worlds they knew, covering distances much more difficult to bridge than any of today's distances, and joining cultures much further apart than any of today's cultures. Charlemagne and Charles V came close to the same achievement. Within the past two centuries, the project of a world empire has been seriously pursued by three organizing geniuses: Bonaparte, Lenin and Hitler, and even with the advantage of hindsight, it does not appear that their projects were chimerical. Had Bonaparte and Hitler disposed of England before attacking Russia, each might have succeeded. Had the Communists been able to unify China in the 1920s rather than the 1940s, the Comintern's project of a world revolution directed from Moscow might have been realized.

Indeed, there are serious analysts for whom the Muscovite project of world empire remains a threat even today. They dismiss the rifts between the Soviet Union and China, and between the Soviet Union and its East Euro-

pean satellites as superficial, and emphasize the fact that no nation has so far reverted from Marxism-Leninism to parliamentary democracy, although many have gone the other way. Nevertheless, given the existing distribution of economic and military power in the world, it seems highly improbable that world empire ruled from Moscow could be established without the armed conquest of Western Europe and the United States by the Soviet Union or that such a conquest could be accomplished without resort to nuclear weapons.

There is no question that the United States and Western Europe, taken separately, are each stronger economically than the Soviet Union, but there are violent differences of opinion about the balance of conventional military strength and of nuclear capability. Although the Reagan administration insists officially that the Soviet Union is militarily stronger than NATO, other analysts, like the French admiral Antoine Sanguinetti, use balance-of-forces information published by the Pentagon to argue that the Soviet Union is vastly inferior to NATO in military manpower and conventional weaponry.

If the road to world empire leads through nuclear war, it is not the most advantageous direction to take. But once the era of nuclear war begins in earnest, any form of government capable of continuing the nuclear danger -- which will henceforth be a permanent feature of the human environment -- will probably seem preferable to the continuation of international anarchy.

The most promising alternative to a world empire founded in desperation, is a world federation to which existing sovereign states surrender their war-making perogatives in return for guaranteed frontiers and political stability. This project does not require a nuclear holocaust as preamble,

and it need not be accomplished at a single stroke. In theory at least, it might develop gradually out of the existing international order.

It is one of the mysteries of modern intellectual history that the fascinating problem of world government has been largely ignored by social scientists. It has attracted rather less scholarly attention than the problem of how to design apartment complexes for elderly couples. The social and political theory of sovereign federations has scarcely advanced a step beyond the analysis that Madison and Hamilton presented in the Federalist Papers in 1787. The best available treatment of the technical aspects of organizing a superstate was published by the Abbe de St. Pierre in 1705. There is an excellent literature on conflict resolution but it touches our subject only peripherally. Such fundamental issues as the military requirements of a world government have not been addressed at all. The economic framework of a world state has yet to be fully visualized. The history of empires has not recently been searched to discover the operating characteristics of superstates. The sociology of conflict has not yet been used to predict the patterns of conflict that might characterize a superstate that lacked external enemies. The extensive knowledge of electoral processes accumulated by modern political science has not been used — even speculatively — to design electoral machinery that might operate across different political cultures.

This extraordinary neglect may be attributed to several factors:

1. Every field of inquiry has, so to speak, its own language. The language in which world government is customarily discussed in UN commissions and international conferences, is so burdened with pious

hypocrisies as to repel serious scholars.

2. Although most of the world's existing states are on record as favoring a world state, their daily policies are not by any means directed toward the eventual surrender of their sovereign powers, and they do not readily support research to advance that purpose.

3. Social scientists on the left are enjoined by Marxist doctrine to oppose the prolongation of capitalism implied by a world federation. At the same time, the peculiar constraints on social engineering in the Soviet Union and the People's Republics make it difficult for them to approach the question of how a socialist world empire might be operated.

4. Social scientists in Western Europe and in North America find it difficult to approach the study of world government without first adhering to one of the movements — antinuclear, pacifist, federalist, ecological — to whom the subject seems to belong. Yet these movements, with their reliance on simple formulas to resolve complex dilemmas, are not especially hospitable to scholarly research.

5. The refusal of social scientists to notice that national states can no longer offer much hope of survival to their peoples, is merely a special case of the adaptive amnesia which has protected the sanity of the human population during the first generations of the nuclear age. The reality being too terrible — and too bizarre — to contemplate, the average citizen leaves nuclear policy to the experts and goes about his business as if the foreseeable future were safe.

That the problem of world government offers opportunities for empirical

research and informed reflection can be shown by listing some typical research questions that suggest themselves as soon as we begin to take seriously the possibility that such a government might be established.

1. To what extent can diverse politics be accommodated within a sovereign federation? Most modern federations, like the U.S., require that all of their component states have constitutions of the same general type. But the genius of the Roman system lay in its ability to absorb states of every kind — monarchical, republican, feudal, urban, popular, tyrannical — without destroying their laws or compromising its own authority. If a world federation, or even a world empire, is to be built with existing national states, it must bring parliamentary democracies, one-party states, and personal tyrannies under the same constitutional roof. But how can this be accomplished?

2. How can problems of succession be resolved in the component states of a sovereign federation? The problem is relatively simple, although not negligible, in parliamentary democracies, more difficult in one-party states, and still more difficult in personal tyrannies, but it is probably not impossible to resolve in any state that has a written constitution, as nearly all contemporary states do. Since the first obligations of a sovereign federation are to guarantee the territory of its component states and the security of their rulers, it goes without saying that a federation government must support the legitimate regime of any of its component states. It will need procedures — agreed on in advance — for settling disputes about legitimacy. But what procedures, applied by whom, in what circumstances?

3. How can the constitutions of component states in a sovereign federation be changed? Since the federation will have guaranteed the constitutional integrity of each component state, it cannot tolerate violent revolutions. But it would be unthinkable to deny the possibility of peaceful ones, and that possibility entails the risk of serious conflict between component states or blocs of states seeking to enlarge their influence at each others' expense. If all the component states of a sovereign federation have written constitutions, and every constitution includes an amendment procedure, many sorts of peaceful changes can be accommodated. For more sweeping changes, the popular referendum — already used by most of the world's non-parliamentary states from time to time — might be the ultimate recourse. But how, when, at whose demand, with what safeguards?

4. What would be the necessary minimum powers of a sovereign federation? The Federalist Papers demonstrated — on abundant historical evidence — that a federation's powers must reach beyond its component states to individual citizens. Otherwise it is merely an association of states, dissolvable at the first crisis. A sovereign federation must be able to tax individuals, to exact military service, to compel appearance in court, to obtain census information, and to punish violations of federation laws, especially of those laws regulating nuclear technology. But how would these powers be exercised, and by whom, and in what ways, and how could they be kept limited?

5. What military forces would be required by a sovereign federation? In international forums, world government is often linked with general and complete disarmament, to be mentioned reverentially on suitable occasions.

General and complete disarmament is indeed a chimerical project; it corresponds to nothing in human experience. A disarmed government is not a government at all. The authority of a world government, like that of any other government, must be founded on a monopoly of violence, and given the scope of its authority, it will require very large forces. Military forces are not raised solely for foreign wars; they have the other function of suppressing rebellion. In a world federation, where any major rebel movement is likely to be armed with nuclear weapons, the armed forces will have to be heavily equipped with both conventional and nuclear weapons, and large enough to confront several crises at the same time. These requirements need to be explored in detail.

6. How could a world government cope with linguistic diversity? The choice lies between a universal language for all governmental purposes, the concurrent use of two or more official languages, or the concurrent use of a universal language and the language of each locality. The contemporary world abounds in examples of all three practices — the use of English as a universal language for international air traffic: the two official languages of Canada and the four of Switzerland; the combination of Hindi and local languages in India — a vast store of experience whose effects on policy and public administration have rarely been studied.

7. Should a world government impose a universal currency, or preserve the existing system of national currencies? This is not an easy question. A world tax system and a world defense budget seem to imply a world currency but, in a federation that includes very dissimilar national economies, the use of a universal currency might have unintended political consequences.

The issues are complex, the relevant historical experience is extensive, and research to date has scarcely defined the problem.

8. What economic policies would be appropriate for a world federation? The first priority of a world federation, as evisaged in this discussion, would be the effective control of nuclear weapons. It may be argued that this task is so important and so difficult that it ought not to be complicated by the addition of other tasks that are less essential. In this view, the economic functions of a world federation should be limited to the enforcement of international contracts and the physical protection of commerce, leaving each component nation free to work out its own economic destiny. But there are plausible counterarguments that a world government would have an inherent moral obligation to improve the condition of its least favored members, and that no government could operate for very long without developing economic goals.

9. By whom should a world government be ruled, and how should it provide for orderly succession? All modern states have individual rulers: either a head of state and a chief of government, or one person who combines those functions. Nations with nominally collective rulership give at least as much authority to individuals as those which celebrate personal leadership. Junta rule leads inexorable to dictatorship. It seems virtually certain that a world government will have either one or two personal rulers elected by some procedure that confers legitimacy. But whether that election should be direct or indirect, and if indirect, whether by a representative assembly or a college of electors, is not easily stipulated.

Some systems of indirect election seem to encourage disputed outcomes,

but not all. The extraordinary complicated procedure whereby the Venetian doges were elected worked for many centuries without a single disputed outcome. The curious method that selects the popes of Rome has worked well for several hundred years now although earlier it produced disputed outcomes. The system of indirect presidential election embodied in the American constitution evolved painlessly into a system of direct election. Again, a large field for research presents itself.

10. How might the legislative and judicial branches of a world government be organized? The classic dilemma, in any federal constitution, is how to balance the claims to equality of equally sovereign component states against the claim of larger states to be represented according to their populations. The bicameral solution adopted in the American constitution is elegant, but formula presumes a rough equality of size and territory among states. It is inconceivable that a world legislature would allow full membership to the mini-states recognized by the UN. Some minimum population would presumably be required and states smaller than the minimum might have to pool their representation. The installation of direct elections in non-parliamentary states seems a large order, and it might be more feasible for each state to devise its own system of choosing representatives. The development of a body of world law and its coordination with national codes has long preoccupied jurists even in the absence of a world government. It remains a challenging problem.

11. Is patriotism possible for the citizens of a world state that has no external enemies? Sociologists see a close connection between group solidarity and hostility towards outsiders. The issue that presents itself,

in crude or sophisticated form, is whether organizational solidarity requires an outside enemy, and if so, whether the "moral equivalent of war" can be found for a universal state and if not, how solidarity can be maintained in the absence of external threat. In this domain, too, there is a vast accumulation of empirical evidence that is relevant to the question, but has not been analyzed in this context.

The foregoing list is by no means exhaustive. Many other aspects of the feasibility of world government invite inquiry; for example, the control of space and space exploration, the definition of fundamental human rights, the place of international diplomacy in a world state, the adaptation of party politics to a mixed polity, the mediation of North-South and East-West conflicts within a framework of world order, the possible influence of such an order on science, technology, education and the arts — questions enough to keep historians, economists, political scientists, jurists, and sociologists busy for decades.

There is one question that eventually takes precedence over all others but that cannot be answered until more work has been done on some of the other issues raised in this paper: what political actions that are feasible today might lead towards a world federation without the prologue of a nuclear world war? A very preliminary analysis suggests that neither of the superpowers is positioned to found a sovereign federation that might eventually become universal, but that various combinations of third powers might do so with a reasonable hope of drawing in the rest of the world, including ultimately the Soviet Union and the United States. Such a project would be a political, not an intellectual, achievement, but it is not likely to come

about unless there has first been a large-scale effort by students of society to take account of our predicament, and to use the accumulated resources of the social sciences to search for a safe deliverence.